A Product Of Its Time by beer_good

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January 5, 1985

Angel hadn't been to a bar since getting his soul, more than 85 years ago now, and sworn to live alone far away from the temptation that every living, breathing, blood-filled human was to his tortured soul...

Well, apart from that time he saved a dog from getting run over.

And that time he worked for the US government during the war.

And all those years he lived in hotels.

And that time he ate a guy in a diner totally by accident.

Oh, and all those years he hung out with Sinatra and Elvis and the Rat Pack in Vegas, obviously. But apart from that, no human contact in 85 years, nosiree.

But he was passing through someplace called Hawkins, Indiana, and he could have sworn they were playing the new Barry Manilow song when he walked past the Hideaway Pub. When he did enter, though, it wasn't "Paradise Café" at all but some other song. But not wanting to raise suspicion, he sauntered over to the bar as casually as any tortured vampire who'd been sleeping rough for a decade or so would. He couldn't help but note that there were still New Year's decorations all over the bar, saying "1985" in very conspicuous ways, as if someone really wanted everyone to know what year it was.

Come to think of it, this whole town seemed very… timely, somehow. Maybe he just wasn't with the times, but he couldn't recall any other city where the video game arcade was the most important building downtown.

He ordered a bourbon. There weren't a whole lot of other people there. A few who looked like regulars (dressed in somehow very 1985-ish clothes, but still) and, two seats over, a kid with very tall hair who couldn't have been more than 18, holding a beer as if he expected it to hug him back. When another song came on, something about last christmas and hearts and stuff, the boy seemed to get something in his eye. Angel really hadn't meant to strike up a conversation, but he hadn't talked to anyone in... oh, a few months now. "Hey, you OK?"

"Huh?" The kid looked surprised. "Yeah, sure. I'm just... life sucks sometimes. Thanks, though. I'm Steve, by the way."

"Angel." Angel scooched over to the seat next to him. "Let me guess. Girl trouble?"

"That obvious, huh?" Steve took another gulp. "I went to this New Year's party and had to watch my ex suck face with her new guy. I guess it got to me."

"I know the feeling." Angel nodded. "And now you're feeling like you want to... well, snap his neck and lock her up and torment her until she loves you again?" *Which would be bad,*, he'd meant to continue, but Steve just stared at him.

"What? Dude, no. I'm not an asshole. She's happier with him, I just need to get over it. It's just..." Steve took another gulp, and it became clear that this wasn't his first beer of the night. "I keep having this feeling like I'm not in control, you know? Like there's some bigger story here where I'm just supposed to play a role that's..." He reached into his bag and pulled out a tattered copy of Stephen King's *IT*. "I've been reading this book, and I keep expecting to turn a page and see myself there. Plus if they're really doing... *that* down in the sewers, I'm the worst babysitter ever."

Angel frowned. "Doing what?"

"On the other hand," Steve continued as if he hadn't heard him, "I'm pretty sure they wouldn't be... allowed to, somehow. Like whoever is writing this wouldn't let that sort of thing happen. Which is kinda weird considering that, y'know, people have *died* and, I mean, *monsters*, and the worst thing is I still get the feeling that one day this will feel like the good old days. How messed up is that?"

Angel tried to look as non-committal as possible. Nostalgia for death and destruction, nope, wouldn't know what that was like.

Steve, meanwhile, emptied his glass and ordered another. But the previous bartender had finished his shift, and the new one gave Steve a very suspicious look. "ID." He checked the one Steve handed over, scratched at it with his thumbnail, and tossed it on the counter. "You're 22? Yeah, right, son. Get out of here before I call the sheriff."

"Yes, sir." Steve didn't even try to object, just got up off his chair, picked up his bag, nodded to Angel and slunk out the door.

The bartender then gave Angel a pretty stern look. "And if you ask me there's been enough strangers meddling in kids' affairs in this town. I suggest you drink up and be on your way."

So he did. Once outside, he caught a welcome smell from the alley. (Why was it always an alley?) Something warm, blood-filled... a nice, juicy rat. He vamped out, dove behind the garbage bin, and bit into the small panicked creature as it squeaked its last. Just as he sucked it dry, he felt someone watching him.

Steve was standing a few feet away, blocking the exit from the alley with his hand in his bag. "OK, what the hell are you?"

Angel sighed, which felt weird in vampface. "This may be hard to believe, but - "

"Let me guess. Fangs, blood... vampire?"

Well, that was very matter-of-fact. "How do you know about vampires?"

Steve gave a short laugh. "I didn't, but why not? That's about all my life was missing. So, what, you're in town to look for virgins to drag

back to your coffin? Is that why you were trying to get me to talk about Nancy? Because - "

"OK, first of all, that's kind of an offensive stereotype," Angel said, standing up.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked, the big 1985 sign flashing above his head.

OK, this had clearly been a mistake from the get-go. Angel just wanted to get out of here and go back to his solitary brooding, and he didn't feel like explaining everything to Steve. "I mean... get out of my way, boy," Angel said as he quickly advanced on Steve, hoping he'd just step out of the way. But then Steve's hand quickly emerged from his bag, holding a goddamn *baseball bat*, and then everything went very dark.

Angel woke up half an hour later, with a baseball bat-shaped bruise on his face. He got to his feet, shook the snow off his shoulders, and happened to kick something. He bent down. A can of… Farrah Fawcett? Huh. It must have fallen out of Steve's bag. He ran his hand through his long, lanky hair. Who knows, it might come in handy some day. He shoved the can of hair spray in his pocket and skulked off into the dark.

Previous fics I've written for this comm:
How To Drain Your Flagon (Wesley Wyndam-Pryce walks into a bar and meets... Khal Drogo!)
Untimely (Drusilla walks into a bar and meets... Zoe Washburne!)
The Scrying of Lot 48 (Willow Rosenberg walks into a bar and meets... Ron Swanson!)
I Will Face My Fear (Dale Cooper walks into a bar and meets... Riley Finn!)